

Female Photography

It is only recently that I have dipped my toe into the waters of fine art photography, and even more recently that I have tried my hand at capturing the female body in photography. I have been reluctant to do so at least in part because I didn't feel I had much to contribute to that genre. It is hard to think of subject more photographed than the female form…sensual or otherwise. From nudes in the woods to the naked female form on motorcycles…it seems it has all been done before, and yet, as an artist, I have always felt compelled to explore, shall we say, tasteful photography of the female body.

It took me some twenty-seven years, but I have finally started a series of photographic studies of the human body, not just women but men too, that I feel does offer something new. And in the process I have found that creating such studies, even when they aren't something totally new and different, can also be fulfilling work.

What got me interested to begin with was a series of images I created of city lights using long exposure times…usually in the range of a second, while moving the camera. I was sitting at an outdoor café in Vietnam late at night with several friends and idly shooting long-exposures of the streetlights across the avenue from where we were sitting. The combination of blinking neon bar lights along with the movement of my camera resulted in a kind of "Liquid fireworks" feel. From that night on I have been hooked on shooting city lights in that manner. As I started to develop a body of work I was struck at the lyrical and even sensual nature of some of the images…and how some of them seemed to take on the form of the female body.

It was the sensual feel of some of those light images that first led me to decide to shoot the human body. I decided to shoot some nude photographs (of both men and women) and combine them with my long-exposure light photos, using Photoshop, to create a series of images that explore combinations of color, light, and nudes. In some cases I have the models take on poses that work with the lights…and other times I will start with the pose and look for lights that match the pose…or that I can manipulate in Photoshop to better enhance the photograph of the model. In some cases the lights take on the appearance of meridians and chakras…while in other cases the lights lend a sense of motion and or energy. Adding the light images can also add and enhance sensuality, mystery, and glamour to the final image.

I combine the images primarily by using clipping paths to create a tight, accurate selection of the body, then adding it as a new layer into the light image. I can then duplicate various layers re-arrange them, and use layer masks to create the impression of the light wrapping around and sometimes going through the human body. I can use adjustment layers with their built-in masks to add dimensionality to the bodies and or add color, intensity or de-saturation to specific areas of the composites. Hue and Saturation controls also allow me to intensify and/or change the colors of the light streaks. Some images can be very simple with only three or four layers, while others become quite complex. I have had some of these images reach up to seventy layers!

It was while combining those forms that I also began to take the nude body, photographed in my studio, and use Photoshop, again, to put the body into other environments…primarily cloudscares. These I have done in a photo-realistic manner so that a casual examination would leave anyone believing the nudes had actually been shot in those environments. By shooting the bodies in my studio I can closely control the lighting enhancing the curves and musculature. By stripping the bodies into cloudscares I can dramatize the sense freedom, expansion and just plain beauty of the photograph.

Now, whenever I travel, I always look forward to creating more of my long-exposure light studies. I have created those images using city lights from Hanoi, to Buenos Aires, to Mumbai to New York. I have long made it a habit to capture interesting cloud forms…and now I also visualize how they might work with the human body. When I get tired of my usual conceptually oriented stock photography projects I give myself a "reward" permission to play with creating new combinations of the human body juxtaposed and interlaced with the light images from my library of lights and/or clouds. Playing with these images restores my energy and fires up my creativity. It gives me a change of pace and renews my sense of exploration, and instills in me the joy of creating beauty for beauties' sake!